

INFO	LOG-00	EEB-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CA-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DEAE-00	DODE-00	DS-00	DHSE-00	OIGO-00	E-00	UTED-00
	VCI-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	VCIE-00	DCP-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00
	EPAU-00	GIWI-00	DOHS-00	SP-00	IRM-00	NCTC-00	FMP-00
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 MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

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SUBJECT: JAMMEH ANNOUNCES ZERO TOLERANCE FOR THE DRUGS TRADE

SUMMARY

¶1. On March 27, President Jammeh strongly condemned the trade in narcotics and urged the country's judges to exercise no mercy for drug dealers in his annual speech to the National Assembly. This is Jammeh's strongest condemnation of the drug trade to date, and could be a reaction to recent events in Guinea-Bissau. In his wide-ranging speech, Jammeh also condemned increasing violent crime while insinuating that it was the fault of immigrants (Nigerians), took a relatively mild shot at homosexual behavior, gave an optimistic outlook on oil exploration, praised major donor Taiwan and Nigeria for providing assistance, expressed hope Obama's election would lead to the renewal of U.S. assistance, announced an undefined program of civil service reform, and warned about the looming impact of the global economic crisis.

DRUGS AND CRIME

¶2. Speaking at the annual State Opening of the National Assembly (the one time he deigns to appear in Parliament each year, a constitutional requirement) Jammeh said his government would exercise zero tolerance for any kinds of drugs because they are synonymous with violence and corruption. He urged the country's judiciary to help the government in its fight against the drug trade. Referring to The Gambia's main domestic drug issue, the widespread growth and use of cannabis, the President told the judges that there cannot be any mitigating circumstances for a man who deliberately grows cannabis because he knows it is illegal.

¶3. Jammeh also expressed concern at what he said are the increasing incidents of violent crime such as rape, kidnappings, murder and contract killings (crime statistics are not available, but anecdotal evidence would seem to support the President). His statement follows the recent arrest of a group of Nigerians who kidnapped an Australian man and held him for 10 days. In what could be interpreted as an indictment of foreigners for these crimes, Jammeh appealed to all foreign nationals living in The Gambia (particularly other West African nationals) to respect the country's laws. He went a step further by urging foreign diplomats to appeal to their communities to be law abiding. Jammeh also made a thinly veiled attack on homosexuality, calling it "strange behavior that even God will not tolerate." This, while still a reason for concern, is a major step back from his bombastic attack on homosexuality last May (08 Banjul 163), and we do not believe it will lead to any increased persecution of homosexuals in The Gambia.

OIL EXPLORATION

¶4. Speaking about The Gambia's efforts to exploit its assumed offshore oil reserves, President Jammeh said the first test drilling will now take place in 2010 and not this year as he had originally

announced. He said the delay was due to difficulties in securing a drilling rig on time for the program. Jammeh said interest was being shown in exploring the other offshore blocks but re-stated his government's determination not to grant prospecting oil companies more than 10 per cent of the proceeds. (COMMENT: This could be the main reason behind the seemingly low level of interest in The Gambia's oil exploration efforts. END COMMENT)

PRAISE FOR DONORS AND REFERENCE TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

15. Jammeh also spoke about his government's efforts to increase the cultivation of rice - the country's staple food. He announced that with the help of the Taiwanese, his government would this year commence the implementation of the Expanded Rice Development Project which will involve the long term cultivation of an additional 250,000 hectares. He said this would make The Gambia self-sufficient in rice. He then added: "Our friends, the Americans, have refused to give us the seeds for Uncle Ben's (rice) but now that Obama is in power, he will get us the seeds." Jammeh also devoted some time to praising relations with Nigeria, perhaps balancing his implied criticism during the crime segment. In an uncharacteristically mild jab at the British, he criticized recent changes in visa requirements. He said since the British had occupied The Gambia without visas for 400 years, by his calculation Gambians should be free to travel to the UK without visas for another 356 years, as they achieved Independence 44 years ago.

16. In what has become a regular theme at such events, Jammeh again spent several minutes of his speech glorifying the women of the country and attacking the men for being lazy. He said women play a pivotal role in the country's socio-economic development and provide the food in 80 per cent of households. Without explicitly attacking the practice of polygamy, Jammeh criticized those men who marry young girls when their first wives become old.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

17. Jammeh also announced that his cabinet has approved a civil service reform strategy which would introduce a special allowance package for civil servants. He did not give any further details or say when it would become effective. (We have been briefed on the package and requested to fund it, along with other donor nations and institutions). He also spoke about the current project of erecting street lights along major roads in the Greater Banjul Area (paid for by Taiwan) and said that with two additional generating sets being installed shortly, there will be no power cuts in the area.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

18. Talking about the global economic crisis and its effects on The Gambia, he said the projected growth rate in the country's Gross Domestic Product would drop from the 6.1 per cent achieved in 2008 and the official inflation rate for the next three years will average around 5.5 per cent. He also made reference to the influx of mainly Nigerian banks into the country, and urged them to provide better banking services in order to positively influence the economy.

COMMENT

19. While the opening of the National Assembly is an important state event enshrined in the constitution, this year's event was turned into a highly politicized event with large numbers of ruling party supporters and cultural dancers lining the route and the Assembly grounds. A public address system played pro-Jammeh songs to the audience outside, and multiple wide-screen TVs (also donated by Taiwan) magnified Jammeh's image inside the chamber for all to see. His speech, although an hour and a half in length, provided no surprises and was generally short on details. Jammeh apparently departed from his prepared text frequently, but did not stray as far from the norm as he has at times in the past. His strong focus on the evils of drug trafficking is a positive development, but the real proof will lie in how his government takes action to defend

against encroaching trafficking groups. END COMMENT